

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 02436

BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT, SP
SUBJECT: POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS: GOVT LOSES FIRST VOTE;
DEBATE ON POLITICAL CALENDAR HEATS UP

1. SUMMARY: THE GOVT'S FIRST PARLIAMENTARY SETBACK,
FOLLOWED BY ITS SUCCESSFUL OPPOSITION IN COMMITTEE TO
ATTEMPTS TO INCLUDE IN THE DRAFT MUNICIPAL ELECTION LAW
AN EXPLICIT TIME FRAME FOR THE HOLDING OF ELECTIONS,
APPEARS TO HAVE SET THE STAGE FOR TOUCH BARGAINING ON
FIRMING UP THE CRITICALLY IMPORTANT POLITICAL CALENDAR.
END SUMMARY.

2. GOVT'S FIRST PARLIAMENTARY SETBACK. THE GOVT ON MARCH
1 LOST ITS FIRST CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES VOTE, WHEN ALL
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OPPOSITION PARTIES, INCLUDING AP, VOTED IN FAVOR OF A
RESOLUTION CRITICIZING SECOND VICE PRESIDENT ABRIL'S
EXPLANATION (IN SUAREZ' ABSENCE) OF THE RECENT CABINET
SHUFFLE AS "INSUFFICIENT." THE RESOLUTION ALSO CALLED
ON THE GOVT TO EXPLAIN ITS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC
PROGRAMS BEFORE THE CHAMBER IN APRIL. ABRIL, CLEARLY
UNPREPARED FOR WHAT UCD FLOOR LEADER PEREZ LLORCA LATER

CALLED A "PARLIAMENTARY AMBUSH" (UCD LEADERS BELIEVED A CURSORY NOTIFICATION OF THE SHUFFLE WOULD SUFFICE), READ A BRIEF STATEMENT ATTRIBUTING THE CHANGES TO FUENTES QUINTANA'S PERSONAL DESIRE TO STEP DOWN, AND REITERATING THE GOVT'S INTENTION TO CONTINUE TO ADHERE TO THE MONCLOA PACTS. ABRIL'S LACKLUSTER PRESENTATION PROMPTED LEADERS OF ALL THE OTHER PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS TO RESPOND THAT IF THE GOVT INTENDED NO CHANGE IN PROGRAM, A CABINET SHUFFLE OF KEY ECONOMIC MINISTERS HARDLY SEEMED APPROPRIATE. THE CONDEMNATORY RESOLUTION WAS THEN PASSED BY 159 VOTES IN FAVOR, 4 OPPOSED, AND 134 ABSTENTIONS, WITH UCD ABSTAINING RATHER THAN VOTING "NO" IN ORDER TO DILUTE THE SETBACK.

3. UCD OPPOSES EXPLICIT MUNICIPALS TIME FRAME. ON MARCH 2, THE NEXT DAY, THE UCD MEMBERS OF THE INTERIOR COMMITTEE DRAFTING THE MUNICIPAL ELECTION LAW, THIS TIME JOINED BY AP, SUCCESSFULLY OPPOSED ANY INCLUSION IN THE DRAFT LAW OF A PREVIOUSLY AGREED PROVISION THAT WOULD HAVE ESTABLISHED A FIXED TIME FRAME FOR THE HOLDING OF MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. AS ORIGINALLY DRAFTED, AND AGREED TO BY UCD, THE LAW WOULD HAVE PROVIDED FOR THE CONVOCA-TION OF MUNICIPALS WITHIN 30 DAYS OF THE PROMULGATION OF THE LAW, WITH THE HOLDING OF ELECTIONS TO FOLLOW WITHIN 65 DAYS OF CONVOCA-TION, THUS LOCKING THE GOVT INTO A SET CALENDAR FROM WHICH IT COULD NOT SUBSEQUENTLY

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DEVIATE.

4. UCD DEPUTY JESUS SANCHO ROF, THE INTERIOR MINISTRY'S DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICY, DEFENDED UCD'S ABOUT FACE ON THE TIME FRAME PROVISION AS DERIVING FROM TECHNICAL PROBLEMS WITH THE CONTINUING CENSUS OF VOTERS AND FROM THE GOVT'S DESIRE TO AVOID COMPLICATING THE CONSTITUTION-WRITING PROCESS BY INJECTING AN ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN. OTHER UCD LEADERS PRIVATELY LINKED THE CHANGE OF HEART TO THE "PARLIAMENTARY AMBUSH" OF THE DAY BEFORE, AND ONE UCD DEPUTY SAID AS MUCH PUBLICLY. THE PSOE IMMEDIATELY RESPONDED THAT THE GOVT'S "BREACH OF FAITH" ON THE LAW WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A "COARSE ELECTORAL TRICK," AND SPOKE OF "POPULAR MOBILIZATIONS" IF THE TIME FRAME PROVISION WAS NOT RESTORED. THE DRAFT LAW WILL NOW BE DEBATED IN A PLENARY SESSION OF THE CONGRESS ON MARCH 8, A DEBATE WHICH WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY GENERATE MORE HEAT THAN LIGHT.

5. COMMENT: IT WAS PREDICTABLE THAT THE PSOE, SEEING THE CABINET SHUFFLE AS A SYMPTOM OF UCD'S INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND WEAKNESSES, WOULD ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT IT

IN PARLIAMENT. SUAREZ ERRED IN NOT ATTENDING THE SESSION, WHERE HIS OWN BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE CABINET SHUFFLE WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE SUFFICED, WHERE ABRIL'S DID NOT. NOTWITHSTANDING THE BARRAGE OF CHARGES AND COUNTER-CHARGES, THIS SKIRMISHING DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE FUNDAMENTALLY AFFECTED THE POLITICAL CONSENSUS ON WHICH THE MONCLOA PACTS ARE BASED. IT DOES, HOWEVER, APPEAR TO HAVE SET THE STAGE FOR SOME VERY HARD BARGAINING ON THE POLITICAL CALENDAR, WHERE THE ORDER IN WHICH ISSUES ARE ADDRESSED, E.G., MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS BEFORE OR AFTER NATIONAL ELECTIONS, MAY BE A CENTRAL FACTOR IN DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF SPAIN'S NEXT PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS. MORE IMMEDIATELY, THE KNOTTY ISSUE OF THE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 MADRID 02436

BRUSSELS ALSO FOR USEEC

POLITICAL TIMETABLE MAY HAVE AN IMPORTANT IMPACT ON THE CLIMATE OF RELATIVE POLITICAL HARMONY WHICH HAS EXISTED HERE SINCE THE SIGNING OF THE MONCLOA PACTS. CERTAINLY IF THE PSOE-LED LEFT GOES TO THE STREETS TO PROTEST UCD EFFORTS TO DELAY MUNICIPALS -- SOMETHING WHICH NEITHER UCD NOR THE PSOE DESIRES AT THIS JUNCTURE BECAUSE OF THE OBVIOUS POTENTIAL FOR DESTABILIZING VIOLENCE -- IT COULD SEVERELY STRAIN

THE CONSENSUS ON WHICH POST-FRANCO POLITICS HAVE
LARGELY BEEN BASED. STABLER

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